

I claim:

1. An out-sourced merchandise-return system providing a general store enterprise of the type having distributed store locations with a service to attract the public into any of the store locations who while visiting a given location to utilize the service might also utilize the visit to shop for and purchase unrelated goods at the given store location, the system comprising:

a plurality of remote merchandisers;

a distributed purchasing public of any of the remote merchandisers' merchandise;

a general store enterprise having distributed store locations at which the general store enterprise offers an out-sourced merchandise return service on behalf of the remote merchandisers as well as offers related packing, shipping and/or mailing supplies which are related by virtue of relating to effecting a merchandise return;

wherein said general store enterprise implements said out-sourced merchandise return service in part by provision of merchandise-return information storage means for storing merchandise-return information applicable to merchandise of the merchandisers; and

wherein the distributed store locations are linked to the merchandise-return information storage means by a communications medium and handle physical processing of returns of purchased merchandise submitted to a given store location if clearance is obtained after contacting the merchandise-return information storage means;

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whereby said out-sourced merchandise-return system affords the general store enterprise opportunities to attract the distributed purchasing public of the remote merchandisers into its store locations so such public while visiting a given location to utilize the service might also utilize the visit to shop for and purchase unrelated goods at the given store location.

2. The merchandise return system of claim 1 wherein:

the merchandise-return information stored on the storage means includes information on original sales transactions by which a given merchandiser fulfilled or caused fulfillment of orders of merchandise.

3. The merchandise return system of claim 2 further comprising:

merchandise identifiers attached to returnable units of merchandise during or before order fulfillment wherein the identifiers facilitate research of information in the merchandise-return information storage means.

4. The merchandise return system of claim 1 wherein the plurality of remote merchandisers deal in a wide variety of differing goods and the general store enterprise offers goods arguably competitive with the goods of the merchandisers.

5. The merchandise return system of claim 4 wherein the general store enterprise comprises one of WAL-MART® or another like major store enterprise.

6. The merchandise return system of claim 1 wherein the merchandise-return information storage means in part includes access to portions of at least one storage means controlled by at least one of the plurality of remote merchants.

[illegible]

7. The merchandise return system of claim 1 wherein the merchandise-return information storage means includes pertinent return-authorization criteria; and

further comprising processing means, activated by contact from any of the given store locations combined with at least an identifying designation of the merchandise presented for return to the given store location, for serving a return-clearance message.

8. The merchandise return system of claim 7 wherein the return-authorization message further comprises return fulfillment instructions in cases of positive return-clearance messages.

9. The merchandise return system of claim 1 further comprising a processing system associated with the merchandise-return information storage means, for processing contacts by the given store locations requesting merchandise-return information on merchandise presented thereto; and

means for serving responsive communications to the pertinent requesting store location.

10. The merchandise return system of claim 9 wherein the responsive communications include either a positive or negative return decision and, in cases of positive return decisions, further comprise return fulfillment instructions.

11. The merchandise return system of claim 9 wherein the responsive communications include either a positive or negative return decision and, in cases of positive return decisions, further comprise an award instruction applicable to the party presenting the return merchandise or else another party, which award instruction can be chosen from any of instant credit, credit provisional that the merchandiser certifies the propriety of the return upon a later date or event, credit honored by a given association of merchants only, a direct refund in cash or equivalent, and/or any combinations thereof.

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13. The merchandise return system of claim 12 wherein the merchandise identifiers comprise bar codes which when scanned decode into a URL address and the request to be processed by the processing system.

14. The merchandise return system of claim 1 wherein the plurality of remote merchandisers comprise assorted online boutique.

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